

# Inwood Hill Park

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THE GREAT TULIP TREE

# Inwood Hill Park

on

## the island of Manhattan

by

*Reginald Pelham Bolton*

Trustee of Dyckman Institute

Author of "Washington Heights—Its Eventful Past"

"Indian Paths in the Great Metropolis," etc.

New York

Published by

Dyckman Institute

at the Cottage by the Great Tree  
Inwood Hill Park

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# INTRODUCTION

BY THE AUTHOR

Inwood Hill Park is situated upon the extreme northerly end of the island of Manhattan. It includes the last tract of the wild woodlands which in pre-historic times covered the Island. It is rich in natural beauty of hills and valleys, commands superb views and is covered by a forest of fine trees. It has unique geologic features, many native wild flowers and plants may be seen in its area and there are remains of aboriginal life of great archæological importance.

It thus affords interest to the student of nature, and is the delight of the artist, the geologist, the botanist, the ornithologist, and the archæologist.

The Park comprises about 110 acres, to which about fifty per cent has been added by the filling in of the Hudson River Shore. The park is under the charge and direction of the Department of Parks of the City of New York: HON. WALTER R. HERRICK, *Commissioner*, HON. JOHN M. HART, *Deputy Commissioner*, JULES BURGEVIN, *Park Architect*, GUSTAVE J. STEINACHER, *Chief Engineer*.



# FOREWORD

BY *HAROLD A. CAPARN*

*LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT*

## INWOOD HILL PARK — AND ITS USE

Few New Yorkers realize what a treasure the city has in Inwood Hill Park. This tract forms the furthest north end of Manhattan Island. Its tip is a wooded promontory which, in past ages, parted from the promontory of Spuyten Duyvil opposite to let the Harlem River through, like Scylla and Charybdis, though, unlike those legendary rocks, they never came together again. The park is a high, rocky bluff, covered for the most part with fertile soil, on which grow some of the finest trees in the State. It is fortunate that this area was formerly held by private owners who preserved much of the original conditions and many of the original trees which were, no doubt, standing when the land was first cut up for country homes. Thus this park site has natural forest, pot holes, Indian remains and a valley that makes the explorer feel as though he were in remote Pennsylvania. And all this and more is actually on Manhattan Island, and has been acquired by the city for a park.



What shall be done with this unique piece of land to make it as useful and accessible to the people as possible without serious damage to its present character? For if ever there was a site that suggested its own treatment it is this. It could be leveled off and smoothed down at vast expense and filled with straight or meandering walks and drives and smug lawns and "scrubbery," but it would resent such treatment by becoming banal and uninteresting, dull and commonplace. Yet there are plenty of spaces, formerly lawns or open spaces, which could be turned back into lawns which visitors might be taught to use without abusing. And the park is full of trails and paths which need only somewhat better connections and access from without to be an almost complete system of footways.

In fact, this is, by its topography, a pedestrian and not a driving park, and there should be no driving in it except perhaps by those who drive to the park and not through it, who come to stay in it for the peace and security in the open air that it affords. Through traffic should be excluded, and provision for it should be made outside of the park, not through it. One of the serious modern problems of the city parks is the reconciling of the rights and comfort of those on foot and those on wheels, for these rights seem, to a greater or less extent, to conflict.

There is in the city a very large class of people who

would and do make the greatest use of the parks as places of outdoor rest and recreation. They wish to sit or lie on the grass and to spend the day or part of it in the open air, much as they would in their own yards if they had any. Many thousands of them do thus use the parks in defiance of the "Keep Off" signs, and it is these who most need the parks and get the greatest benefits from them. Unfortunately, the majority leave papers and other refuse behind them, and a smaller number leave broken bottles as mementoes of their visits, a form of misdemeanor which should be sternly repressed.



## INWOOD HILL PARK

Inwood Hill Park is a tract of forested hills which the City of New York has been so fortunate as to secure in its original condition. By the good fortune of its inaccessibility in past years, this space of more than one hundred acres was retarded in development, and though surveyed and mapped for the construction of streets, it escaped the ravages of the contractor and builder and remained in the possession of a few private owners. Its great natural beauty has thus to a great extent remained in undisturbed condition.

When the City of New York, after many years of hesitation, finally acquired the area now composing the Park, no provision was made for its improvement or for its policing and protection.

Its splendid forest, including the great Tulip Tree, oldest living object on the island of Manhattan, lay open to the raids of despoilers of trees, plants and flowers; its invaluable remains of aboriginal existence were buried and inaccessible, its natural waterfront was occupied by a fleet of house-boats, its shores covered with their rubbish, and the woods littered with waste objects.

In this situation the Dyckman Institute found an

opportunity to provide some assistance to the City of New York, as its trustees were at that time seeking an objective which would enable the Institute to perform some public service to the growing population of its home district.

The library which for many years had been maintained by the Institute, and had served a good purpose of education and information, had come to the end of its career as a local institution, because a branch library of the New York Public Library system had been established on Vermilyea Avenue.

The trustees of the Institute then volunteered to protect and care for some part of the natural and archeological treasures of the Park area.

The then Park Commissioner, the Hon. Francis D. Gallatin, welcomed the offer, and appointed the Institute honorary curators of an interesting tract of about 20 acres, which included the historic evidences of aboriginal life. This he designated the "Indian Life Reservation," and included therein the Great Tree, the little cottage nearby, and the buildings which house the Inwood Pottery.

The Institute proceeded to clear up the area then littered with tons of waste materials, bricks, timber, iron-work, broken glass, ash cans, furniture, parts of automobiles and boats, and bedsprings.

Under the direction of the Institute a gang of men dug deep holes in soft ground in out-of-the-way





THE INDIAN TRAIL TO SHORA-KAP-POK

places and buried these unsightly materials and objects. By persistent action of the Department of Parks, the owners and occupants of the house-boats were, after long delay, compelled to remove their floats from Spuyten Duyvil Creek. The Park Department removed a large number of dead chestnut trees and other fallen and dangerous timber throughout the park, greatly improving the condition of the forest land. The Institute then repaired the Cottage at the Great Tree, which has served a useful purpose as a public shelter, and as a home for a caretaker. The Institute maintains a small library and museum of aboriginal objects found in the Park.

The Department of Parks has maintained the policy of preservation of this park as a safe resort for the use of the public, free from the intrusion of motor vehicles, and the Department since that decision was made, has constructed foot-paths which have opened the park to visitors, now affording easy access to many of its beautiful features.

Much work remains to be done, especially upon the level space between the Park and Isham Park, which was filled in by the debris from the municipal subway. This is planned by the Department to be improved with a spacious playground, for which it is naturally adapted, and the improvement will unite Inwood Hill Park with Isham Park.

Many enquiries are made regarding the grassy



THE ARTIST'S PATHWAY

island in the sharp bend of Spuyten Duyvil Creek. That island was originally part of a long promontory of salt grass meadow extending from the mainland, round which point the old Creek made its sinuous way. The U. S. Ship canal cut through the meadow, leaving the point as the present island. It is really a part of the Borough of the Bronx. It is claimed by private owners, by whom it is leased to the Inwood Yacht Club.

The proposal to make of Inwood hill a public park was originated by the late Andrew H. Green, who had a considerable share in the acquisition of Central Park. He made a public plea in 1895 that this beautiful and romantic tract should be acquired by the City, and thus set in motion, by his great influence in civic betterment, the project which eventually resulted in the preservation of the splendid tract as public property.

The Park, as now constituted, embraces the hill extending steeply from Dyckman Street northwards to the United States Canal, approximately two-thirds of a mile. Its western boundary is the Hudson River and it has been extended on this side by the filling in of the waterfront with debris from the Municipal Subway excavations which will add a flat tract of about fifty acres to the park.

On the east side the park is bounded by Payson Avenue (once known as Prescott Avenue) a short dis-



The  
First  
Boring

The Second  
Boring

A Third  
Boring  
Buried



NATURE'S WORK IN THE ICE-AGE

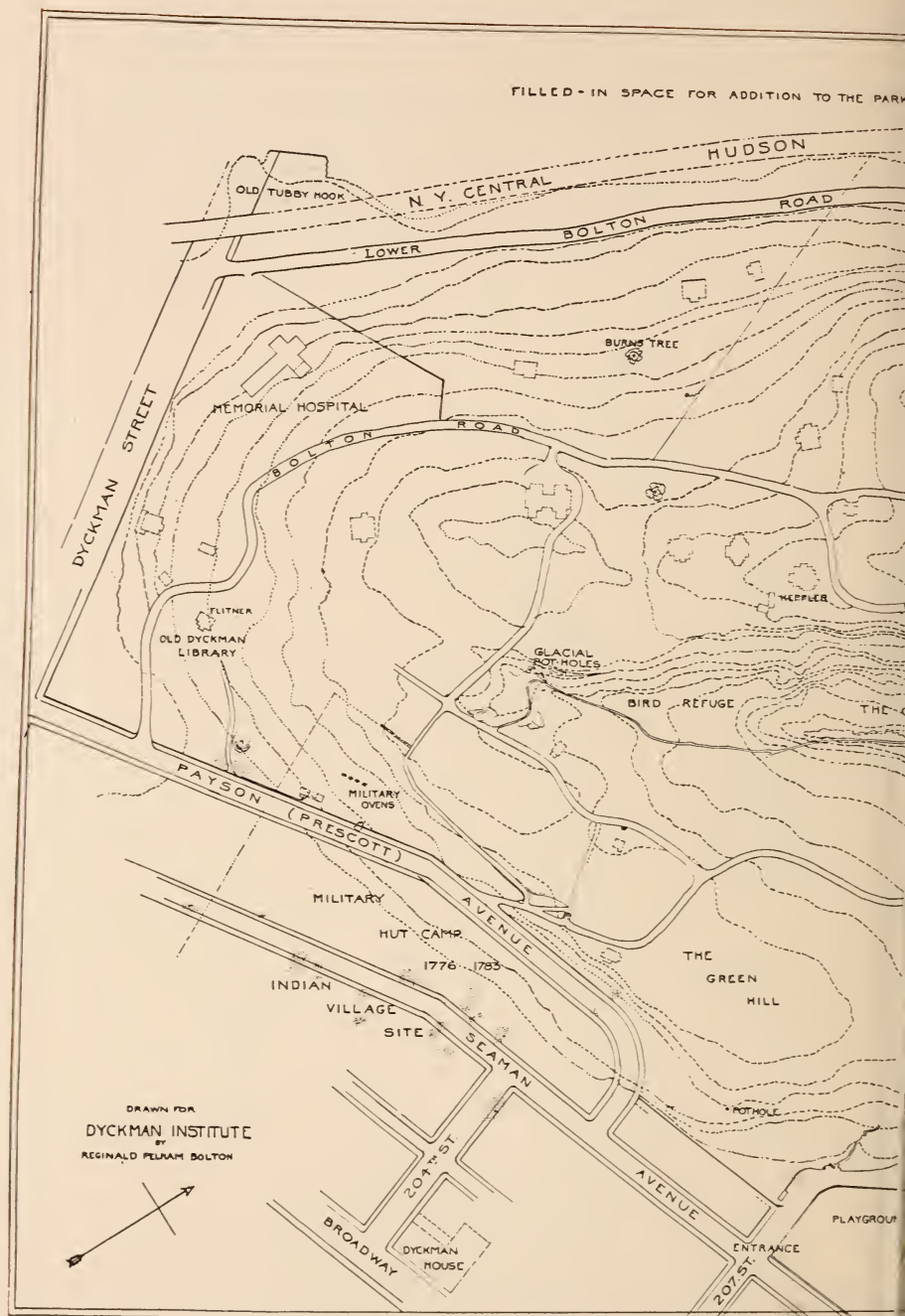


tance west of Broadway. The main entrance is at 207th Street, from which point paths lead to the Great Tree, to the Inwood Pottery and to the Cottage. The Park may be reached:

- (1) The 207th Street Station of the I. R. T. Subway at 10th Avenue, whence walk west directly to the Park.
- (2) The Crosstown line of surface cars, operating from Broadway to Pelham Avenue, Bronx.
- (3) The 207th Street Station of the newly constructed Municipal Subway on Broadway, whence walk one block west.
- (4) The Kingsbridge (225th Street) surface cars on Broadway.
- (5) The Park can also be entered from Dyckman Street by the River Road.
- (6) Payson Avenue, whence a foot path leads directly to the Glacial Pot Holes.

*No automobiles are permitted within the Park.*  
Foot paths lead to all points of interest.







## DYCKMAN INSTITUTE AND ITS WORK

There was in Colonial times a long-standing controversy between the little township of New Haerlem and its large neighbor, the town of Nieuw Amsterdam, later New York, as to the ownership of a tract of land known as "Haerlem Commons," which extended across the upper part of Central Park. The controversy culminated in an Act of the Legislature, 28 March, 1820, under authority of which the "Commons" were sold in 1825, the proceeds being devoted to the establishment and support of three educational institutions.

One of these was the Hamilton Free School, incorporated by another Act of the Legislature dated 17 April, 1818. This institution was located on Washington Heights at 183rd Street, near Broadway, which was then the "Kingsbridge Road."

This school existed until 1852-3, when it was destroyed by fire. It was not rebuilt, because the public school system was about to be extended to the Heights.

So the money derived from the sale of the vacant site, was devoted to the establishment of a public library for the district which became known later as the Dyckman tract, or Inwood.

The library was organized as "*Dyckman Library*,"





SPUYTEN DUYVIL CREEK FROM INWOOD POTTERY

by a charter issued by the Legislature of the State of New York in the year 1860, and it maintained the only free library in the district for a period of sixty years.

By the careful husbanding of its resources, and by the care of the Trustees in its management, the endowment of the Library so increased, that when in 1924 it became evident that a Public Library would supplant the Old Village library, the Trustees decided to change the name of the organization to Dyckman Institute, and to devote its activities to the protection and policing of Inwood Hill Park.

So much public interest has been expressed in the results of this civic service, that the Institute now publishes this description of the interesting features of Inwood Hill Park, which it has been the pleasure of its Trustees to protect and render available to the public.

The Trustees of Dyckman Institute are:

MR. ALEXANDER McMILLAN WELCH, *President*,  
MRS. BASHFORD DEAN,  
MR. WILLIAM L. CALVER,  
MR. REGINALD PELHAM BOLTON, *Secretary*.



THE COTTAGE AT THE GREAT TREE

## THE GREAT TULIP TREE

This is a gigantic specimen of one of our native trees, the *Liriodendron Tulipifera*. It is an unusually aged tree, for its race is not long-lived. Its age has been estimated from the circumference of its trunk, at more than two and a half centuries. It is the oldest living object on the Island of Manhattan. It has grown on a knoll near the shore of Spuyten Duyvil Creek, through a compact deposit of oyster shells and carbonized materials which were accumulated by the aborigines who occupied the place until about two hundred years ago. In its younger days it occupied the center of the Indian village in the glen.

While it was in private possession, the risks to which it was exposed attracted the interest and attention of Commissioner Stover, who secured funds from private donors to erect a fence to protect the tree. The Forestry Bureau of the Department of Parks has afforded particular care of the tree, by cultivation around its base, and by expert repairs applied to some extensive cavities in its limbs.

### THE COTTAGE

This little building, about 120 years of age, was for many years utilized by fishing parties visiting the then secluded Spuyten Duyvil Creek. When acquired by the City, it was in a semi-ruinous condition, uninhabitable, and surrounded with a wild tangle of weeds.



INCINERATOR AND SIGN

By EMILIO CABRAL DIAZ

Indian Artist



With the approval of the Park Architect, the Institute repaired and remodeled the interior of the old cottage, preserving its quaint exterior.

The cottage now provides a public room and a spacious porch that can be utilized as a shelter by visitors. In the public room there is a small library of books of reference, and some cases in which are exhibited objects illustrating aboriginal life found in the park, such as stone implements, flaked points, and many fragments of native pottery. There is also an exhibit of the pottery made by Aimee Voorhees at the Inwood Pottery, developed by that talented artist from Indian designs and forms. Various military objects illustrate stirring events which took place in the park and its vicinity during the War of the Revolution.

Near the cottage there is a model of a native Bark Hut, made in cement by Emilio Diaz, chief of the Chibcha Indians of Colombia, whose craftsmanship will be seen in the well-casing and the rock pools in the vicinity of the Cottage.

The waterfront is the ancient Spuyten Duyvil Creek, known to the Indian residents as "Shorakappok" which separated Manhattan Island from the mainland. All other parts of this ancient waterway have disappeared in the United States Ship Canal.

Many visitors have expressed interest in the unique cement signs, incinerators, and the rock-pools in the





POT-HOLES OF THE ICE-AGE

Park, which are the handiwork of the Indian artist,  
EMILIO CABRAL DIAZ,  
whose services were for some years employed by  
Dyckman Institute upon this work.

## INDIAN REMAINS

The native occupancy of Inwood Hill Park must have extended over a very long time. This is evidenced by the extent of waste materials left by the native occupants, consisting of the shells of oysters, with accumulations of wood ashes and carbonized food, composing a bed from one to three feet in thickness, spread over acres of the surface of the glen and through the contiguous woodland. The natives occupying the place at the time of the arrival of the white settlers, were found to be of the Weckquaesgeek tribe, whose chief village was at Dobbs Ferry. Our local clan was at that time led by a sachem named RECHEWAC, whose place of residence is known to have been near 94th Street and Park Avenue, and from this leader our Inwood residents became known as RECH-GA-WA-WANC.

Their form of building was a bark-covered hut, sometimes long enough to accommodate a number of families. Where natural shelter could be obtained, as in caverns, and under overhanging rocks, such places were also occupied by them.

The cave in Inwood Hill Park was so occupied for a very long period. Their life in this natural shelter is evidenced by layers of ashes left by them during successive seasons of occupation. In these beds of ashes, the late Alexander Chenoweth, an engineer resi-

dent in the vicinity, found the fragments of several large pottery vessels, with a number of stone tools and implements. There are other rock-shelters near by, in which the natives made a home, probably placing skins over the openings.

We may with certainty describe the Inwood cave as the earliest dwelling of mankind on the Island of Manhattan.

These natives hung on to their poor homes until 1715, when the survivors of the clan were induced to abandon the place. The name of the locality, which in Indian fashion applied to land and contiguous water, was recorded in early deeds as

SHORA-KAP-KOK or SHORAKAPPOK, which has had several definitions, and was certainly descriptive of local features. It was clipped in Indian fashion from Shaue-kopoke-ok or *the closed-between-place*, by inference a "sheltered safe place." The Dutch settlers of the vicinity called the place "*Spuyten Duyvil alias the Fresh Spring*."

A more detailed account of native life in this locality and of the interesting evidences of their long-time existence, will be found in "*Washington Heights, Its Eventful Past*," by Reginald Pelham Bolton.

## THE GLACIAL POT HOLES

A discovery of importance in the geological history of Manhattan was made in 1931, by the uncovering of a series of deeply bored pot holes in the rocks composing the ridge of Inwood Hill Park.

When cleared by Dyckman Institute, these borings were found to be splendid specimens of the work of the icy torrents emerging from the glacier which once spread over our continent.

Within several of these pot holes there are still to be seen the hard water-worn boulders which accomplished the work. Such holes were the effect of the glacial period which is estimated to have existed between 30,000 and 50,000 years ago.

In several instances they consist of two or three successive borings, indicating a change in the conditions, which may corroborate the successive advance and retreat of the ice during the long glacial age. In one of these holes a large white oak tree has grown to large proportions in the opening made by the ice which burst the massive rock in which the hole was bored. These holes are situated at an elevation of almost 200 feet above tidewater.

After inspection by competent geologists and report to the Department of Parks, the holes were cleared and surrounding space made available for inspection and study.



## THE INWOOD POTTERY

### THE ART OF ABORIGINAL AMERICA

Inwood Park includes in its area an unique educational and artistic institution, in the "*Inwood Pottery*," which had been established before the City acquired the tract, by Harry Voorhees and his talented wife, Aimee LePrince Voorhees. The work is carried on by these artists in a group of simple buildings, contiguous to a fishermens' little cottage, which is an attractive feature of the shore line.

The attention of Aimee Voorhees has been particularly directed to the art of the American Indian, and her reproductions of the pottery of our local natives derived from fragments found in the vicinity, and her development of Indian designs, are affording the means of appreciating the beauty of form, and the skilful simplicity of the aboriginal artists.

Classes are held in the Pottery, to which many students are attracted, who carry thence a knowledge of our real American art. Groups of children gather to learn the pleasant work of plastic art. The products of the Pottery include some delightful and original forms, and attractive glazes.

The subject of Indian Arts and Crafts may be seen and studied in the splendid collections of the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, at Broadway and 155th Street.





MODEL OF INDIAN LIFE IN THE PARK  
MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN  
*By WILLIAM C. ORCHARD*

INWOOD HILL PARK  
AN ARTIST'S STUDIO

*By Arthur Schwieder*

The artist will find in the Park a rest from this machine age, an oasis in our desert of storm and strife, necessary to the average human being, as well as to an artist, helping him to collect his wits and find out whither he goeth.

Here a creative artist can paint stirring pictures of huge boulders that give a feeling of eternity to a canvas, wooded nooks with the sun filtering through the leaves, a quiet lagoon bordered by natural vegetation, and just across an island a swift running river winding around a curving hill.

All these forms give movement to an artist's creation.

Stimulating his imagination is an old ruin with a steep dark forbidding roof, and in an abandoned institutional building there are vacant chambers on whose walls the onetime occupants have scratched their tragic histories.

This mediæval looking structure with its barred windows surrounded by majestic trees crowns the summit of a high hill overlooking the beautiful Hudson River, with its everchanging moods.

The mighty Palisades march up and down the opposite bank, and all these contrasts seen under the

numberless light effects from dawn to sunset form varied material and inspiration for thousands of pictures.

In this paradise where the engineer and landscape gardener with their straight roads, concrete walks, artificial playgrounds and flower beds are still held at bay, one can walk in the forest lands, follow winding natural paths up and down the hills, through leafy bowers made by overhanging branches, where even the weeds have beauty of design all their own.

This unspoiled landscape is within our gates. It is the last bit of natural landscape near us, and the only place where an artist can find variety of material; for at most of the well-known art colonies the material for painting is limited to either hills and trees, or boats, sand and water, while here one finds old and quaint houses, boats, hills, rocks and trees, inspiring views from sunrise to sunset, and the glorious waters which mirror all these beauties.

A creative artist could work in this park indefinitely.

I have known it for many years and am still finding surprises, and I know that it will continue to show me new beauties as long as I paint there.

The machine and the horse are excluded, affording one peace and quiet to woo nature as he would a beautiful lady, trusting that she too might reveal her secrets to him.

## NATURE IN THE PARK

The student of nature will find abundant material for interest and observation in this forested tract.

The Forestry Bureau of the Department of Parks has placed labels on a number of trees, indicating their character, but the Botanist will find ample reward for more detailed investigation, and will locate specimens of the various trees that once formed the covering of the Island of Manhattan.

The wolves and bears that once prowled through the forest are no longer in existence, but the gray squirrels and the rabbits that have escaped the murderous weapons of boys and hoodlums, share the shelter of the woodlands with many varieties of birds. In the spring season, the woods echo the song of many visitors, and even in winter the night herons, sandpipers and kingfishers maintain a home along the old creek, while woodpeckers, juncos and fox-sparrows compete for a share of berries and worms, and the bluejay screeches overhead. In the more shady recesses of the Clove the thrush and the vireo warble, and high overhead the fishhawk and the sparrowhawk may sometimes be seen.

Protection of the wild flowers has been a difficult undertaking, and many of the ferns and native plants, such as our familiar "Dutchman's Breeches" have been ruthlessly torn up. By persistent watchfulness and

the slow process of education, these and other wild plants are being protected and invited to carpet the forest floor once more.

















